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Re-Inventing the Centre-periphery Relation by the European Capitals of Culture. Case-studies: Marseille-Provence 2013 and Pecs 2010

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Abstract: *The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) Program was initiated in mid 80's, as a modality to promote the richness and diversity of European cultures. It soon became evident that the Program's impact went beyond the cultural and political aspects and that the designation was a marketing opportunity for cities to improve image on a national and European scale, a regeneration tool in itself. ECoC is today about cities re-inventing their identities, re-narrating their history in a European context. The peripheral position, the unwanted heritage of the cities' past, soon became elements to be exploited and re-invented. The study is focused on two border cities that won the ECoC title and their ability to use the title as a regenerative tool, in order to foster their European identity, to favourably reorient their geography and to reposition themselves on Europe's map: Marseille-Provence 2013 (a Western Europe big city/region with an ex-colonial past and a peripheral position complex) and Pecs 2010 (a small Eastern peripheral city with a communist past). Applying qualitative content analysis on three types of documents: Application (Bid) books, official web pages and ex-post European Commission's evaluations, the article intends to identify the narratives used by these border cities to comply with the European dimension of the ECoC project.*

Key words: *European Capital of Culture, centre-periphery, urban regeneration, local narratives, European dimension.*

Introduction. Why study EcoC border cities in 2015?

2015 is an important year for Romania from the point of view of participating to the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) Program and designating it's the winning city for the year 2021. According the ECoC Program's Timetable, each of the Member States concerned, have to publish a Call of submissions of applications no later than six years before the ECoC year is due to begin. After that, interested cities have ten months to submit applications consisting in the Program which the candidate city plans to realize for the given year; the assessment of candidatures is realised in each country by a mix Selection Panel, composed by national and European experts. So, by the end of this year we will find out which are the official Romanian candidate cities and what is the content of their Bid Book – the slogan and concept of the candidature and the proposed Cultural program.

As a relative new member of the European Union (EU), situated at its Eastern border, non-member of the Schengen Area nor the Euro Area, Romania is in a peripheral position related to the Western core of European countries. It will be challenging to see how our candidate cities will construct, through their bids, their image and identity in relation with the European identity – the “European dimension” of the city being the main selection criteria of the Program. Cities with peripheral European position won the ECoC

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title in the past, and they can be useful and inspiring best-practice case studies. This is *rationale* of this paper. A discussion related to core-periphery concepts in relation with the ECoC and the Program's evolution will precede, within the economy of this article two proposed ECoC border cities case studies.

Core-periphery within the European Capital of Culture Program. Exploring the European dimension of ECoC border cities

After the EU Eastern enlargement (2004), ECoC Program was seen as a tool aimed at influencing the cultural unity in a renewed Union, where new Member States had the opportunity to bring to the front their culture and to feel as equals with the older Member States. The designation procedure has changed starting with 2009: the EU has annually designated two ECoCs – one from an old and one from a new Member State. Moreover, from 2010, cities' candidacies are being judged following two criteria: "European dimension" and "City and citizens". Since 2010, Central and Eastern European cities prepared applications presenting themselves through their culture and city space as "European". Several cities, carrying "the physical and mental heritage of the past socialist regimes, have aimed at strengthening their belonging to the European cultural and social sphere through the ECoC designation and the regeneration project it enables"².

A lot of cities geographically situated in a border, marginal and peripheral European position competed for the title and even have won it. In this new phase of the ECoC program the discussions on Europe and European identity became the major focus of the implementation of the program. In addition, the discussions of defining Europe and European cultural identity have inter-wined with the aims of urban transformation and regeneration. The goal of this paper is to identify the discursive connection between urban regeneration and the European dimension (or the idea of Europe or Europeanisation). I want to explore the articulation of local narratives of ECoC border cities in the broader European context. I also want to discuss how border or peripheral ECoCs use the transformation of their cities to reinvent their image with the purpose of place branding and place marketing in relation to the idea of Europe/European dimension.

Within the ECoC programme, it was argued that "the European dimension is most visible when the ECoC candidates reflect their own history as a part of European history, particularly when hinting at their involvement with the major ideologies of the XIXth and XXth centuries, such as National Socialism, Communism and Colonialism"³. ECoC is about cities re-inventing their identities, re-narrating their history in a European context. But how ex-communist or ex-colonial cities deal with their past? How they narrate their past in order to fit in the European dimension of the ECoC program? The purpose of this paper is to identify the narratives used by these border cities to comply with one particular selection ECoC criteria: the European dimension of the city.

The focus of this investigation is on two ex-ECoCs, from an old EU member state, France – Marseille-Provence (2013) and from a new EU member state, Hungary – Pecs (2010). Putting to the side the obvious scale difference regarding the number of inhabitants, the two cities have been chosen from several reasons: the geographical position (at the time of their application for the title they were both border cities of the European Union, prior to Romania's accession); they are situated at the most challenging

² Tuuli Lahdesmaki, "European Capital of Culture Designation as an Initiator of Urban Transformation in the Post-socialist Countries," *European Planning Studies* 22-3 (2014): 483.

³ Nicole L. Immler and Hans Sakkers, "(Re) Programming Europe: European Capitals of Culture: Rethinking the Role of Culture," *Journal of European Studies* 44, 1 (2014): 16.

EU borders: Southern and respectively, Eastern; the ex-colonial, respectively ex-communist past of the city/country; that fact that they hold the title since 2010 (the introduction of the two selection criteria for holding the title and the existence of ex-post evaluation Reports of the European Commission).

The research data consist of Application (Bid) books, official web pages and ex-post European Commission's evaluations. The method used was the qualitative content analysis with the purpose of a close reading of these documents and discussing cities plans for transformation through various views on urban issues.

Centre-periphery economic discrepancies and the Soul of Europe

While EU was advancing in pursuing its economic projects such as the Single Market or the Euro Area, a cold, technocratic multispeed integration became visible, or a so called Europe of concentric circles of policy participation.⁴ Due to some states' inability to implement policies on the long run, different strata of Members States, gathered around a hard core (more often composed by France, Germany or Great Britain) became visible. The core-periphery relation is most likely to be encountered in studies of economic underdevelopment and dependency and tend to draw on the Marxist tradition of analysis. It can be understood in relation with Wallerstein's world systems theory.

Social and economic inequalities became for the first time visible after the 1981 and 1986 enlargement, when Greece⁵, Spain and Portugal joined the European Community. A North-South, rich-poor development axis became evident. The development discrepancies became even more spatial visible in a core-periphery, West-East axis, after the 2004 EU enlargement. Moreover, following the current global economic crisis we are witnessing the revival of the division between the allegedly diligent North and the lazy South. Peripheral states in crisis such as Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Slovenia partially perceived⁶ their situation as being "publicly humiliated by the centres of the EU and the North", putting them in "a condition of internal postcoloniality, whereby the periphery has become the resource (in economic, financial and cultural-moral sense) for the reproduction of the power regimes of the centre"⁷.

Started as an economic integration project, European Union soon found itself in the situation of searching for its soul, because, paraphrasing Jacques Delors, nobody can fall in love with the Common Market. The discourses of European identity and cultural identity as common ground to build solidarity may have been introduced in the 80s to compensate for economic disparities and democratic deficit. In fact, the use of the word "Capital" makes us think of Centre, in contrast with 'Hinterland', province and periphery. But the ECoC title is no longer about big capital cities, as it was the case at its beginning. Since more than a decade ago, the title was held mostly by cities coming from *hinterland* and not by capital cities *per se*. In the context of cultural "capital", the Program allows cities to shift of the perception of centre-periphery, to move the attention from traditional core-periphery distinction and to put themselves in the spotlight. I will present next a general overview of the evolution of the ECoC Program.

⁴ Alex Warleigh, *Flexible Integration. Wich Model for the European Union?* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

⁵ No wonder that the initiative for creating what we call today "European Capital of Culture" came in 1985 at the suggestion of the Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouris.

⁶ The electoral high results of left-wing parties in Greece (Syriza) and Spain (Podemos) in general elections (2015) and European elections (2014) reflect this perception.

⁷ Ksenija Vidmar Horvat, "Rebordering the Perspective on EU: A View from the Slovenian Periphery," *Javnost-The Public* 21-3 (2014): 93.

Historical and legislative framework of the ECoC Program

The “European Capital of Culture” is a title awarded for one year in the name of a city, by the European Union, following a selection process, period within the city organizes a series of cultural events with a strong European dimension. Its main objectives are to safeguard and promote the diversity of European cultures and to highlight common features and also, to foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of the cities.

This Initiative had a dynamic history. It started as European “City of Culture” award, in 1985, with the purpose to “bring the people of the Member States closer together”⁸. There were no specific selection criteria at that time, in principle, each Member State, in alphabetical order, was given the possibility to host the event. Alterations of the chronological order were allowed, by agreement. Nominations would be made two years in advance. Also, Member States were responsible for financing the event. Because of these arrangements, until 1999, the Cities of Culture were, in fact, big Western European cities, with a strong cultural profile, such as: Athens (1985), Florence (1986), Berlin (1988), Paris (1989), Madrid (1992).

Glasgow – EcoC 1990 was the first industrial city to hold the title, peripheral in relation with the former shiny cultural cities, and it created the precedent of using culture as a regeneration tool for other troubled cities.

The first years of the Initiative seem inspired by a top-down entrepreneurial vision. „Entrepreneurial strategies”⁹ are market oriented, targeting purely economic objectives: economic growth based on tourism, „city competitiveness”¹⁰, promoting the city’s image, organising spectacular mega-events in the city centre. An example of such strategy is the so-called „Bilbao effect” or „Barcelona model”¹¹, Spanish cities which „have become Meccas of urban regeneration from industrial cities of a post-authoritarian regime to culturally vibrant magnets of visitors, and all in only a few decades”¹². Bilbao became famous in 1997 with the inauguration of the Guggenheim Museum; as for Barcelona, the 1992 Olympic Games represented a catalyst for urban regeneration and major infrastructure development. This vision is related to the “old” (since the ‘50s) *rationale* of cultural policy-making, promoting “high quality art” (...) maintaining prestigious facilities for ‘high’ culture marketed to wealthy visitors, which emphasizes ‘exclusiveness’¹³. These elite “flagship” schemes are meant to “enhance urban competitiveness”¹⁴.

⁸ “Resolution of the Ministers Responsible for Cultural Affairs, Meeting within the Council, of 13 June 1985 Concerning the Annual Event 'European City of Culture',” *Official Journal of the European Communities*, C 153, 22 June 1985.

⁹ Phil Hubbard, “Urban Design and City Regeneration: Social Representations of Entrepreneurial Landscapes,” *Urban Studies* 33-8(1996): 1441-1461.

¹⁰ Michael E. Porter, “The Competitive Advantage of the Inner City,” *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1995): 55-71.

¹¹ Sara Gonzalez, “Bilbao and Barcelona 'in Motion'. How Urban Regeneration 'Models' Travel and Mutate in the Global Flows of Policy Tourism,” *Urban Studies* 48 (2011): 1397-1418; Joaquim Rius Ulldemolins, “Culture and Authenticity in Urban Regeneration Processes: Place Branding in Central Barcelona,” *Urban Studies* 20, 10 (2014).

¹² Gonzales, 1397.

¹³ Franco Bianchini, „Rethinking European Cities: The Role of Cultural Policies,” in *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration*, ed. Franco Bianchini and Michael Parkinson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

Critics of the entrepreneurial model argued that: it only creates a regeneration of the city centre, following a “top-down” approach; it is a “branding engineering”¹⁵ consisting in investments in big events as the city is being built as a “place for consumption”¹⁶, “for the tourists”¹⁷, rather for its inhabitants. There is a tension between the logic of building prestigious facilities for wealthy visitors and opening up public access to them. In the former vision, culture has just an instrumental role, cities evaluating the success of their cultural activities according to economic standards, rather than public benefits. Arts are being marketed and “have moved (...) from being administered as a public service to being managed as businesses paying their way in increased property values, job creation and tourism.”¹⁸. This logic aims “at rethinking cultural production and participation as a key competitive asset, at strengthening and refurbishing industrial heritage buildings and facilities into cultural uses and cultural quarters”¹⁹. This approach was mostly criticised for missing key aspects of development sustainability, especially from the social point of view.

The European „City of Culture” award was, at its origins, an intergovernmental initiative, the decision for nominating the cultural cities being taken by member states representatives. The first delegation of some cultural competencies to the Community was the result of the Treaty of Maastricht, in 1992. After that, in 1999 an EU Decision²⁰ offered to the Initiative „European City of Culture” the status of Community Action, a new name – „European Capital of Culture”, a financing scheme, new selection criteria and new evaluation criteria. It was also adopted a chronological list of states nominated to hold the title until 2019, following the principle „one year- one state”. The Council was responsible for the official nomination of ECoCs, following one or more proposals from the member states. Candidate cities were supposed to propose a cultural project responding to a specific theme of European interest. At that time, the general objectives of the Programme were „to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, as well as to promote greater mutual acquaintance between European citizens” (art. 3). It didn’t exist any mention of the goal of urban development, even though in the art. 5-6 of the Preamble of the 1999 EU Decision were highlighted the flaws of the City of Culture Initiative, in terms of lack of sustainability and community development: “the positive impact has none the less not always produced results lasting beyond the duration of the project itself (...) this initiative is important both for strengthening local and regional identity and for fostering European integration”.

One of the few comparative evaluative studies of the ECoC Programme was released in 2004 and it collected information related to 21 cities, which held the title between 1995 and 2004. The study highlighted the change in the Program’s purpose, towards a bottom-up, participative vision: even though most ECoC cities assumed most often objectives referring to “the need to raise the international profile of the city and its

¹⁵ Pierluigi Sacco et al., “Understanding Culture-led Local Development: A Critique of Alternative Theoretical Explanations,” *Urban Studies* (10 December 2013): 7, accessed May 14, 2014, <http://usj.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/12/17/0042098013512876>.

¹⁶ Gonzales, 1397.

¹⁷ Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

¹⁸ Miles Malcom, “Interruptions: Testing the Rhetoric of Culturally Led Urban Development,” *Urban Studies* 42(2005): 894.

¹⁹ Sacco et al., 7.

²⁰ “Decision No. 1419/1999/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 May 1999 Establishing a Community Action for the European Capital of Culture Event for the Years 2005 to 2019,” *Official Journal* L 166 (1999): 1.

region, to attract visitors and to enhance pride and self-confidence”²¹, other cities included in their objectives “expanding the local audience for culture, making improvements to cultural infrastructure, developing relationships with other European cities and regions, promoting creativity and innovation and developing the careers/talents of local artists”²². Most ECoCs aimed “to reach a wide audience and increase participation in culture”²³, but for some cities analysed in the quoted study, this was a high priority, which can be anchored in the progressive strategies of cultural development.

The *progressive* or *capability* strategy, distinguishes from the market approaches of cultural activities, focusing instead on the distribution of benefits to the citizens. In this case, the success of development is not measured in terms of economic growth, but “the goal is to reduce socio-economic disparities and raise overall standards of living through redistributive policies and the encouragement of citizen participation”²⁴. Also, if the entrepreneurial strategy is focused on city competitiveness, and internationalisation, the non-market oriented strategy values “decentralized, community based provision of more popular cultural activities, targeted in particular at low income and marginalized social groups”²⁵, aiming to “protect and develop indigenous local and regional identities, and the culture of often socially and economically disadvantaged immigrant community”²⁶.

This strategy gives value to the access to culture and seems to be inspired by Amartya Sen capability theory²⁷, even though his theory was not created for cultural contexts, but to explain underdevelopment instead. Following Sen, the persistence of development discrepancies are the result of the fact that poorness equals lack of information and experience which allow individuals to set goals and to transform existing resources into welfare. In a similar logic, access to culture is reduced because individuals do not have the capabilities necessary to evaluate the positive benefits of cultural experiences. Progressive cultural strategies seek to obtain a raised, bottom-up, access and participation of citizens to culture, the support of local cultural production, and they also seek to enhance the community identity and to revitalize the disadvantaged areas. Local authorities may decide to transform unused properties into community cultural centres and to stimulate the interest for local cultural heritage²⁸. Also, local governments may try to develop “the function of the city centre as a focus for public social life, genuinely accessible for all citizens.”²⁹ This strategy was also criticised as promoting parochialism. For example, the cultural strategy implemented by Cork, European Capital of Culture 2005, was considered as being parochial, “as a consequence of self-referential exasperation of local issues”³⁰.

Community development and social inclusion were amongst their most important objectives for ECoCs Copenhagen, Brussels, Rotterdam, Helsinki, Graz, and Stockholm. Helsinki used the slogans “a City of Children and a City for All” and Rotterdam “Vital City” and “young@rotterdam” among others. Over half the cities studied had projects for

²¹ “European Cities and Capitals of Culture Study Prepared for the European Commission,” Part. I (Bruxelles: Palmer-Rae Associates, august 2004): 14.

²² Ibid., 14.

²³ Ibid., 16.

²⁴ Carl Grodach and Anastasia Loukaitou- Sideris, “Cultural Development Strategies and Urban Revitalization,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13, 4 (2007): 355.

²⁵ Bianchini, 19.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Amartya K. Sen, *Comodities and Capabilities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

²⁸ Grodach and Loukaitou- Sideris, 355.

²⁹ Bianchini, 19.

³⁰ Sacco et al., 9.

people with disabilities, the socially disadvantaged (The First Homeless street-soccer World Cup in Graz; a theatre group working in Bruges prison) and minority groups. In a few cities projects were developed especially for women, the elderly (Art in elderly people's homes in Helsinki) and the unemployed. As we have seen, many ECoC cities have gone further the official objectives of the ECoC programme, in stating explicit social, economic or tourism objectives. The introduction of such objectives into the ECoC Community Action has both shaped and reflected broader trends in cultural policy.

ECoC legislative framework was again modified in 2005 and 2006, in order to allow newer EU Member States (which joined EU in 2004 and 2007) to participate to the Programme, therefore the principle of nomination became, starting with 2009, „one year-two States”- an old Member State and a new one.³¹ Central and Eastern peripheral ex-communist countries became eligible to hold the title. EU enlargements enriched the diversity of the cultural heritage, but identifying and promoting its common features was put to challenge. This is the reason why a new EU Decision³², from 2006, introduced two criteria of selection: the “European dimension” of the Cultural Programme (“the programme shall foster cooperation between cultural operators, artists and cities from the relevant Member States and other Member States in any cultural sector; highlight the richness of cultural diversity in Europe; to bring the common aspects of European cultures to the fore” - Art. 4.1); and the second one, “City and Citizens” (the programme shall: “foster the participation of the citizens living in the city and its surroundings and raise their interest as well as the interest of citizens from abroad; be sustainable and be an integral part of the long-term cultural and social development of the city”- Art. 4.2). The challenge met by cities coming from peripheral European positions was to highlight their European identity dimension.

The selection procedures described in the 2006 EU Decision were applied starting with 2010³³. That was the starting point of the internal national bidding system for the designation of ECoC. Before that, and back until 1999, ECoCs were directly designated by the Council, following the nomination of governments, without any mandatory internal competition between different competing cities. Sibiu 2007 did not compete with any Romanian city; it was directly nominated to receive this title, before Romania was even an EU member state.

ECoC framework was modified in 2014³⁴, with new rules for the period 2020-2033. These are the rules based upon the candidature of Romanian cities for ECoC 2021 will be judged. The new rules are adding to the original objectives of the ECoC (“to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the common features they share”) a new objective: “to foster the contribution of culture to the *long-term development of cities* in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities (art.

³¹ “Decision No. 649/2005/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2005,” *Official Journal* L 117 (2005): 20.

³² “Decision No. 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 Establishing a Community Action for the European Capital of Culture Event for the Years 2007 to 2019,” *Official Journal of the European Union* L 304 (2006).

³³ Given the time-scale of ECoC implementation, preparation of which begins 6 years before the title year, the 2006 Decision maintained the application of the 1999 Decision to the ECoC for 2007, 2008 and 2009 and foresaw transitional provisions for the titles for 2010, 2011 and 2012.

³⁴ “Decision No. 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 Establishing a Union Action for the European Capitals of Culture for the Years 2020 to 2033 and Repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, L132/1-14 (2014).

2).”³⁵ This new objective is motivated in the Preamble of the 2014 EU Decision as being the result of the fact that cities holding the title in the past have progressively added this new dimension by using the leverage effect of the title to stimulate their more general development. In particular, past evidence has shown “the potential of the European Capitals of Culture as a catalyst for local development and cultural tourism (Preamble)”³⁶ Moreover, cities are now encouraged to embed the ECoC cultural programme in a long-term culture-led development strategy, having a sustainable impact on local economic, cultural and social development.

The European Capital of Culture Program rapidly made evident that its impact goes beyond the cultural and political aspects as “cities recognized that the designation was a marketing opportunity to improve image on a national and European scale and constituted a sort of regeneration tool.”³⁷ The peripheral position, the unwanted heritage of the cities’ past, soon became elements to be exploited and re-invented within the general ECoC purpose of promoting the diversity and richness of European cultures. In the following part of the paper, the focus will be on two border cities that won the ECoC title and their ability to use the title as a regenerative tool, in order to foster their European identity, to reorient their geography and to reposition themselves on Europe’s map.

Border European Capital of culture cities. Local narratives of Pecs 2010 and Marseille-Provence 2013.

We have explored the candidature and promotional materials on urban regeneration in the two selected ECoC border cities, in order to discover what kind of meaning and values are related to urban regeneration of these cities, so that they express the European dimension requested by the Program. Special attention was being paid to traces of colonialist, respectively communist heritage, and the discourse used to deal with the heritage of the past. We have gathered the main cities local narratives in a few ideas, articulated in a European context.

What is the urgency for winning ECoC title? Culture as a catalyst for image change and local development

Both cities have a certain urgency seen as a problem that belongs to the city and that can be solved through the cultural year. This urgency can be understood by the candidacy slogan. Pecs run its bid under the slogan “Borderless city”. During its history, the city suffered from having a peripheral position in relation to Budapest and Western Europe and this position was turned central into the application, through a reinterpretation of the centre-periphery relation. Pecs’s message to Europe highlighted the rich cultural experience of a border region that has Pecs in its centre.

Marseille-Provence used the slogan “Sharing the South” and assumed as a mission the sustainable development of both shores of the Mediterranean Sea, as “an exemplary Euro-Mediterranean region”. The city always suffered from a Southern/peripheral complex, due to the fact that during its history it has been perceived as peripheral in relation with Paris and also had a negative reputation due to the big number of immigrants, mostly from Northern Africa. Through the ECoC title Marseille wanted to

³⁵ Ibid., 4.

³⁶ Ibid., 2.

³⁷ GiannaLia Cogliandro, “European Cities of Culture for the Year 2000: A Wealth of Urban Cultures for Celebrating the Turn of the Century” (Final Report) (Bruxelles: Association of the European Cities of Culture of the year 2000, AECC/AVEC, 2001): 8.

respond to the challenge of demographic, economic, ecologic and cultural asymmetry between the North and the South shore of the Mediterranean Sea. This North-South divide is obvious even from the *motto* of the Bid:

“Even today, we can still find a clear-eyed understanding in France and a consideration with regard to those rare and rarely satisfied men who are too great to be fulfilled by any form of patriotism and who, as Northerners, know how to love the South and in the South, love the North – those natural Mediterranean, those good Europeans” (Friedrich Nietzsche)³⁸.

Internationalising the city

In its Bid Book Pecs presents itself as a regional/international spokesperson, with the role of presenting “the cultural diversity of its international cultural region that is open towards the Balkans”³⁹. Its peripheral European position is transformed into a central one, with the goal “to become one of the cultural centres of an international region at the border of Western and South-Eastern Europe.”⁴⁰ Marseille assumes as a goal to build an image for the Marseille-Provence region that is “international, creative and welcoming”. “Sharing the South” strategy refers in itself to the creation of a “permanent hub for intercultural, Euro-Mediterranean dialogue in Marseilles”⁴¹.

Multiculturalism

Pecs is presenting itself as a multicultural city, as opposed to the past homogenous socialist identity. In the past “it developed cultural layers of Latin, Turkish, German, Croatian and Hungarian origin. Today it is the most important centre of German, Croatian and Romany culture in Hungary.”⁴² The purpose of the city is to bring to the light the multicultural richness of one of the “least-known borders of Europe”⁴³.

Marseille is referring to itself as “the most cosmopolitan European city (...) with some thirty ethnic groups who have settled and coexist here. Generous and hospitable for the last 20 centuries, it is an intercultural city *par excellence*.”⁴⁴ Even though immigration control has always been a problem for Marseille, in its Bid Book it presents this situation as a challenge and opportunity, as a European laboratory: “Marseilles is a privileged testing ground of cultural integration at a time when issues related to immigration are increasingly central to European construction.”⁴⁵

Exploiting the geographical position

In the application materials of the investigated ECoCs, the location of the designated cities was discussed “both as a geographical and mental condition”⁴⁶. Cities are

³⁸ “Marseille-Provence 2013, European and Mediterranean Application to Become the European Capital of Culture.” (2008): 3, accessed January 5, 2015, http://www.mp2013.fr/pro/files/2012/02/MP13_DP_EN.pdf.

³⁹ “European Capital of Culture Pecs 2010, Borderless City,” (2006): 9, accessed January 5, 2015, http://www.pecs2010.hu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/pecs2010_english.pdf.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁴¹ “Marseille-Provence 2013,” 21.

⁴² “European Capital of Culture Pecs 2010,” 17.

⁴³ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁴ “Marseille-Provence 2013,” 203.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁶ Lahdesmaki, 491.

“keen to portray themselves in central positions no matter where they are on the map”⁴⁷. Pecs narrate itself as “mediator” between East and West, between “the cultures of the Balkans and Western Europe”⁴⁸, a “gateway open to the Balkans and parts of Europe which do not yet belong to the European Union”⁴⁹. Pecs reveals its will to belong to the Western Europe and it raises the religious argument: “A culture is seen as Western or Eastern according to its religious traditions, and a culture built on either Islamic or Orthodox Christian traditions is today generally considered as Eastern.”⁵⁰ After 1989, Hungary focused on Westernisation and Pecs has been particularly important due to its UNESCO World Heritage Site status (the pre-Christian necropolis), so that “historically Christian city has overridden its more recent socialist past”⁵¹. Using symbols derived from Catholic and Protestant ideology was seen as “a strategy to find meaningful semantic alternatives to the preponderance of socialist imagery and architecture.”⁵²

Marseille presents itself as a European cultural metropolis situated in the centre of the Euro-Mediterranean region. Its main acknowledged potential is the geographical one: “strategically located in the middle of the Latin Arc that unites metropolises along the Northern bank of the Mediterranean”⁵³. Marseilles reorients its geography and does not present itself as a Southern European city, but instead, as a city situated on the North shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, the concepts of North and South used in the Bid Book are referring to the two different shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and not, as we would expect, to the North or South of Europe. As an interesting detail, one promotional material of Marseille-Provence 2013 presented a reversed North-South map of Europe, Marseille being in the North, as an open point towards the Mediterranean Sea.

Dealing with the past legacy

Following the positive evaluation of the European Commission of Linz ECoC 2009, in its honest demarche of acknowledging its National-Socialist history as a part of its identity and, other ECoC cities have aimed to link their darkest and unwanted past to the idea of European identity in an attempt of making peace with their history. Pecs assumed as an important message to Europe that it “wishes to place a particular emphasis on the cultural legacy of East-Central European socialism.”⁵⁴ The proximity of the 20th anniversary of the political transition in the countries of East-Central Europe, was seen by Pecs as “a grand opportunity to examine more closely the cultural heritage of East-Central European socialism and the consequences of the political transition.”⁵⁵ The socialist period is seen as a troubled part in Pecs’s history “which we have not yet been able to consign to history”; its heritage “is deeply engraved in our attitudes, we live in its buildings, its objects surround us all.”⁵⁶

⁴⁷ Immler and Sakkers, 15.

⁴⁸ “European Capital of Culture Pecs 2010,” 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁵¹ Cynthia Imogen Hammond, “Renegade Ornament and the Image of the Post-Socialist City,” in *Halb-Vergangenheit. Stadtische Raume und urbane Lebenswelten vor und nach der Wende* [Half-past. Urban space and urban lifestyles before and after the turn], ed. Timea Kovacs (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2010): 187.

⁵² Ibid., 186.

⁵³ “Marseille-Provence 2013,” 203.

⁵⁴ “European Capital of Culture Pecs 2010,” 21.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.

At its turn, Marseille acknowledged as a part of its “Sharing the South” strategy a thematic project called “Overseas and the Colonial World”. In conjunction with the creation of an Overseas Memorial, the archives department of the City of Marseilles organised educational workshops for students, devoted to the history of both colonisation and Marseilles. That is the only mention of the colonial past of Marseille in its Bid Book. But the most challenging ideas of the Bid document are the attempt of Marseille to turn its weak points - immigration, unemployed and lack of European devotion from the part of the immigrant population- into advantages -the aged and old North of Europe will need the working force of the overwhelmingly young South, and Marseille holds the door open for them.

Reinventing urbanity. The role of public spaces

The urban development of cities is being developed with the purpose of accommodating people and their activities. Pecs considers one of the pillar of its application the fact that it is “the city of lively public spaces”, as opposed to the “limited public spaces”⁵⁷ existent during the communist-era, when “the streets of Pecs (...) have been perceived as state property, rather than the common property of the people.”⁵⁸

The renovation of squares, parks and pedestrian streets in order to attract local people to spend time in the inner city in a new way, are examples of opening up the city to its citizens. It may attract new residents, shops and investors. These transformations obey the planning principles conceptualised as New Urbanism, which stress “the rediscovery of the city centre and its activities, pedestrian-friendly urban design, diversity and openness of public space, urban aesthetics, and quality of design and sustainability and good quality of life as a base for urban planning.”⁵⁹ The regeneration ideologies and planning principles related to New Urbanism are present in Pecs’ Bid Book: “The reconstruction of the historical centre of a city for the purpose of boosting tourism may give the entire district a museum-like character, and thereby drive out all the people living there, with the consequent loss of their multi-faceted way of life.”⁶⁰

In the same spirit, besides “Sharing the South” as an international Strategy, Marseille proposed also a local strategy designated “La Cité Radieuse” (The Radiant City) that corresponds to the goal of developing “artistic and cultural activity as a force for the renewal of the city by conjugating four issues: the quality of public space, cultural irrigation of the area, the appeal of the metropolis and widespread public participation”⁶¹.

Besides the transformation of the city centre, the practice of transforming the former industrial estates to a new cultural use – a practice which started in the Western countries in the 80s- is also used as a progressive bottom-up regeneration strategy. In general, the investigated ECoCs aimed to modernize and repair the city image through various construction projects. The preparations for the cultural year included initiatives of improving the existent general infrastructure of the city (transport network, neighbourhoods inhabited by miners and workers) and constructing new one, in particular cultural infrastructure (new museum, concert halls, libraries). Pecs particularly underwent a large scale transformation in order to upgrade itself: the construction of a Music and Conference Centre and a Regional Library.

⁵⁷ Hammond, 187.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 189.

⁵⁹ Lahdesmaki, 489.

⁶⁰ “European Capital of Culture Pecs 2010,” 34.

⁶¹ “Marseille-Provence 2013,” 21.

Similar to the case of Pecs, the sustainability of Marseille-Provence 2013 can be measured through its infrastructure legacies. The renovation of the Marseille waterfront was the main urban regeneration project and the most representative one, considering Marseille's assumed role of a metropolis situated at the intersection of the cultural and economic exchanges between Europe and the Mediterranean Sea. Two new symbolic locations were built in Marseille's Port: the Museum of the European and Mediterranean Civilizations and the Mediterranean Regional Centre. Recreation and shopping areas were also created in the old Port, area that used to be Marseilles worst district. Marseille's regeneration project can be seen as a community building project through the emphasis of Euro-Mediterranean identity and solidarity.

Moreover, regarding the aspect of community building and encouraging public participation to culture, Marseille's main project was called "Euro-Mediterranean Workshops". It was meant to represent the intersection between art and society: artists from all disciplines (mostly visual arts) have taken over for a limited period of time spaces not usually associated with culture (public institutions, companies), bringing about unique encounters between art and society. For example, a musical director organised within a period a two months a choral concert with the employees of the Credit Bank of Marseille; another artist directed a short movie called "Disorder", filmed during five months at the Psychiatric Hospital, consisting in monologues and conversations.

The largest component of the regeneration project in the case of Pecs was also a community building one: the establishment of a cultural quarter in a former large industrial site, the Zsolnay Porcelain Factory - in that part of the building complex of the factory from which production has already been removed. The project also included building a thematic park of industrial history. We can interpret this project with the words from the Bid Book: "Cities today are seen as a collection of "places" and "non-places". It is common to designate as a "place" those buildings and spaces that provide a unique character for a city and are linked to its mythology."⁶² The Zsolany factory is dating from the turn of the XXth century and the Zsolany family ran it until its confiscation by the Communists in 1948. It was once "the pride of the Hungarian commerce"⁶³ and it has been a tourist site from its foundation. After the fall of the communism the factory remained in the state property and it degraded itself and it was argued for the clear quality loss between the pre and post World War II products. Opening a new civic centre in this location, associated with the Austro-Hungarian temporal layer of Pecs's identity, symbolize a return to a Golden Age which existed before the communist period.

Conclusions

After the analysis of the two cases, we can conclude that both cities tried to reorient their geography in order to place themselves in a Central position, instead of the actual peripheral one. Both cities presented visions of re-inventing the Southern and Eastern European periphery.

In the case of Pecs, the cultural year was used as an instrument for image change, which consisted in the emphasis of a Central position of the city at the intersection of Western Europe and the Balkans, a Christian Western cultural tradition and a regional/international image of a multicultural city. Belonging to an ex-communist country, the city's identity was rebuilt appealing to a late XIXth century pre-communist Golden Age, the period of the flourishing Zsolany porcelain factory, keeping a flavour of past monarchic Hungarian times.

⁶² "European Capital of Culture Pecs 2010," 39.

⁶³ Esther Vecsey, "Zsolany Porcelain. A Hungarian Tradition," *Ceramics Technical* 13 (2001): 90.

Those times were made accessible to the public through the inauguration of the new Zsolany cultural centre on the unused premises of the factory, as the major regeneration project of the city. Community building and the sustainability of the project are its major results. In the case of Marseille, the cultural year was used to shift the city's position from a Southern Europe peripheral city, confronting immigration and acute unemployment, to an alleged Central position within a Euro-Mediterranean area. The title was also an opportunity to attract public funding in order to build major infrastructure and bidding in the name of the Provence Region probably facilitated this goal. Similar to Pecs, one of Marseilles strong points as an ex-ECoC is considered to be the sustainability of its legacy, through its built infrastructure. The renovation of the waterfront and the construction of the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations at the entrance of the Old Port of Marseille are the main infrastructure investments. They have symbolically added value related to the attempt of Marseille to present itself as a Euro-Mediterranean metropolis, minimising, under the multiculturalism discourse, the French colonial past and the current acute immigration and integration issues.

Besides Pecs and Marseille, an extensive future study could include other ECoC cities having a border or marginal position, questioning the articulation of their local narratives in a broader European context: Tallin 2011 (Finland port), Turku 2011 (Estian port-city), Maribor 2012 (Slovakian city, near the Croatian border, Eastern border of the European Union at that time, Schengen border), Kosice 2013 (Slovenian city, near the Ukrainian border, Schengen border), Umea 2014 (Swedish port), Riga 2014 (Latvian port, Schengen border).

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